

REBEL DESTINY

641 over whom it was exercised. When the ancestors of the
[607] Bush Negroes were brought to New World slavery, what
measure of acquiescence they showed was due to the fact
that slavery was not an unfamiliar tradition to them. They
knew of the war captive, or the man convicted of a serious
crime, who was a slave to one of their own kind. But the
experience of the white man's slavery was a crucible in
which the ownership of man by man, and the unquestioning
obedience which men owed to those of higher rank, were
destroyed, leaving only the ideal of the life of free men.
"Free!" was the way in which one Bush Negro toasted
[603] another, or a white man, when he drank with him. A "*Man
Nengere*," an adult Negro was, above all, a free man, and
621 it was as a freeman that he was governed, for though
villages had chiefs, and there were bassias who were sub-
ordinate to chiefs, and though above the village chiefs were
clan chiefs, and over them all the Granman, yet the final
word rested with the members of each subsidiary body,
and not with its leader.

624 Every village had its officials, and its medium for discus-
[619] sions. Every clan had its head, and its old men, who,
sounding out the will of the clan members, consulted with
that head when questions were to be decided. For the
[643] decisions affecting the entire Saramacca River, there were
[692] the Granman and his *krutu*, before whom questions of
larger policy or disputes between villages were brought.

620 Perhaps most impressive of all was the measure of auton-
[614] omy which each village had. A village, or certainly a group
of neighboring villages belonging to the same clan, formed
609 a small kingdom. A Bush Negro of another village who
came to visit, came as any stranger, paddle in hand, his
top cloth covering his loin cloth. When he found himself
in a strange village on a night when a dance was being
given, he did not join the dancers until after much urging
by a native of that village, and then he danced little, and
if he were a particularly fine dancer, he took care not to
flaunt his superior gifts. The exception to this, to be sure,
were the sacred dances, when a stranger, whose god came

"OBIA COMESI"

feared by all who themselves do not have Kromanti. Obia 776
Kromanti warns and protects and heals, but its powers 575
are only for those who belong to the Kromanti group.

Whether Kromanti is the African warrior society pre- 575
served in this bush, it is impossible to say. If this were the
case, then the definite military organization of many of the
West African societies should be present. The military
character of any group among the Bush Negroes could
not even be hinted at, of course, without the greatest
caution. In their descriptions of the Kromanti, our intimates
among the Bush Negroes never indicated in any way the
existence of such an organization. Even leading questions
brought out only unqualified denials instead of the revealing
answers "I do not know," or "Massa Gadu sabi." Yet there
are undoubtedly secrets which Kromanti men do not share
with outsiders, and we remembered that when a Kromanti
man dies, he must be "separated" from the Kromanti group 766
just as he is "separated" from his family and from his village.

About the very meaning of the word Kromanti there can 105
only be speculation. During the time of the slave trade, 579
there were two ports on the Gold Coast of Africa known as 567
Little and Great Coromantyne. From these ports came the
slaves who, in the New World, were known as Coromantyne
slaves. These slaves were so warlike, so prone to cause
uprisings, that only English and Dutch colonies consented
to buy them and in these colonies when slave rebellions broke
out to alarm the white planters, they were led by the proud
Coromantyne slaves.

It would not be strange, therefore, if the same term was 776
carried over into the free civilization of this bush to 575
typify the obia which represented a dominant over-
hanging fighters who had won this freedom.

Other indications point to the same assumption. The
strongest spirits of the Kromanti, those which inspire the
greatest fear when they possess men of a village are
Tigri and Djádja. Tigri is the jaguar, Djadja is often vaguely
translated by our word "devil." If we again turn to the
West African societies, we find that one of the most dreaded

/7 cont./

- 101 4th. Bonnie /Böni/ Negroes, living on the river above Marowyné;
 [175] until 1862 they were in a state of slavery among the
 • [567] Aucaners, but at that time, through the intervention of
 the government, they were released from it. Their name
 is supposed to be derived from a former runaway slave who
 had placed himself at their head.

Chapter III

Government, Laws, Administration of Justice

- 643 Each of these tribes, except for the Bonnie Negroes, has
 [292] a chief whom they call granman (governor); the uniform given
 to him by the government is a blue tunic with epaulets and a
 cocked hat with white plush.

Among the Aucaners the chief is called Byman, a cunning,
 courageous, and prudent man, around 63 years old.

The chief of the Saramaccaners is called Abram, an infirm
 old man who is very weak of character and has little influence.

The Mantoewari Negroes have a chief called Kalkoen, who,
 although aged and infirm, can nonetheless still be called firm of
 character.

- 631 /8/ Under their chief they have a certain number of captains
 and council members. The former are divided into bush captains,
 [554] who take command in case of war, and into house or land cap-
 tains, who deal with internal matters with the chief. The token
 of their prestige given to them by the government consists of a
 large staff with a round silver ball (drum-major's stick), on which
 is the Netherlands coat of arms with "Je maintiendrai."

- 344 They have a large open shed which serves them as court
 and which they call kroetoehoso (probably derived from the English
 "courthouse").

- 682 Their legislation is very limited. One who kills another
 is punished with death; one who poisons someone suffers death by
 torture, provided that substantial irrefutable proof exists. (See
 Chapter XI below.) If the death penalty is not appropriate, the

682 /8 cont. /

[672] culprit is condemned to find the requital in his offspring. His
 • [567] children, children's children, and great-grandchildren must render
 slave services for the family of the person poisoned.

692 Moreover, they usually act in accordance with the judgment
 and the decision of their elders or council members. Most punish-
 681 ments consist of whip lashes.

Chapter IV

Weapons

411 These consist of rifles, machetes, bow and arrow, and lances.

278 In some cases they also use a kind of cudgel (1). The most dangerous

682

1. An Indian weapon called apotoe.

one that they possess, however, is an assortment of vegetable poisons
 with which they can secretly strike their enemies and whose effects
 manifest themselves slowly, but are usually lethal. They not only
 mix these with one food or another, or in snuff or tobacco, but in
 the case of some can merely bring them in contact with a part of
 the body and thereby produce to the most infectious results.

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Chapter V

Dwellings, Practices, Customs, Housekeeping

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824 Their huts are constructed low above the ground from un-
 worked round wood, covered with palm, "ba" leaves or palm
 species (1), and surrounded by palisade pales.

1. Euterpe oleracea Mart.

352

The couches and sleeping places within are also made of
 paling.

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372 Inside the hut is found the hearth or place for the fire, on
 which they cook and in which they constantly maintain a fire for

584 /14 cont. /

and, once this has been promised, she does indeed continue to be regarded specifically as the betrothed of the person who made the request. As soon as she is marriageable, she is handed over to her man with or without her consent, and it may be regarded as a rare case when such a promise is broken.

[431] The man to whom she is promised sometimes does not see his future wife before the occasion of her betrothal, but usually he is concerned with her upbringing and from time to time give her presents consisting of money, pantjes, and corals.

[591] Some take the girl promised to them even when she is only three or four years old in order to rear her further.

[672] The promising of newborn girls takes place for the most part when there are obligations between parents, as was reported in [682] Chapter III, and in the case of enslavement which is done to one [567] family by another in case of poisoning, and so forth.

586 It is an everyday occurrence that a woman leaves her husband or a man his wife for another.

595 Polygyny is much practiced, and among my workers I know several who have three or four wives, most of whom are very young. Some, however, have only one wife.

[513] It is noteworthy that all the wives sleep with the man in one hut, while in addition he perhaps keeps with him a girl whom he is bringing up to be his wife. One wife will be /15/ with him in the hammock and lies with her feet at the head end of the hut and the latter in turn with his feet at the head end of the woman, while the other women sleep in their hammocks.

[484] If a Bush Negro goes out, he is to celebrate a festival or in order to float wood to the town, he takes all his wives with him; only in case of illness do they remain behind.

[578] His wives get money separately, and therefore they must also separately provide for his food, so that one cooks the food in the morning, another at midday, a third in the evening, etc. This way of life and their jealous nature frequently bring about household quarrels that rarely end in any way other than bloody fights.

585 Upon the conclusion of a marriage the man is obligated to
583 give the parents of the girl as a marriage portion a long, broad,